

Agenda Item

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Report Status

For information/note ☒
For consultation & views ☐
For decision ☒

Report to Haringey Schools Forum – 16 October 2025

Report Title: Education Welfare Service

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Purpose:

To update Schools' Forum on the continued delivery of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) under the existing model, whereby all schools are provided with an enhanced core offer to reflect the CSSB contribution to the service. Schools are also offered enhanced support through a traded service arrangement.

Recommendations:

1. To acknowledge the continued need for a central Education Welfare Service (EWS) to provide schools with expert support in managing complex attendance cases, issuing Penalty Notices (PNs), and implementing timely statutory interventions where appropriate. EWS also is the strategic lead and has drafted an Attendance Strategy and introduced the Attendance Management Board.
2. Enable the service to continue to support schools and families in addressing barriers to school attendance and safeguarding pupils.
3. Continue to draw upon the experience and expertise within the Education Welfare Service (EWS), ensuring that schools receive timely, accurate, and comprehensive guidance on all matters relating to pupil attendance, strategic guidance and boroughwide approach to all attendance related matters.

1. Introduction.

Background and current position

Overall absence and persistent absenteeism (PA) remain areas of concern in Haringey. In the 2024–2025 academic year, the overall absence rate in the primary phase was 5.5%, which is slightly higher than both the London average of 5.4% and the national average of 5.2%. The PA rate for primary pupils in Haringey stood at 15.8%, higher than the London average of 15.1% and the national rate of 13.5%.

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The overall absence rate in Haringey's secondary schools is 7.8%, which is higher than the London average of 7.4%, but lower than the national average of 8.6%.

The PA rate in the secondary phase stands at 24.5%, which is above both the London average of 22.3% and the national average of 24.3%

2. Historically, there were concerns around service delivery and Education Welfare Service (EWS) not meeting the needs of Haringey schools. Since September 2024 significant service improvements have been implemented. All Haringey schools now have an allocated Education Welfare Officer (EWO) and receive an enhanced core offer free of charge.
 - 2.1. The core offer now includes regular advice, guidance and communication of key attendance messages delivered through the EWO. In response to feedback from schools, we have increased EWO presence in schools and EWOs are now regularly holding parent and pupil meetings in schools.
 - 2.2. To assist schools in managing attendance effectively, sample attendance policies and template letters have been shared with schools. Training on day-to-day attendance management has been delivered and continues to be available. Schools may request these sessions on an ad hoc basis, with content adapted to meet individual school need and resource capacity.
 - 2.3. Termly Targeted Support Meetings are held with every school, with follow-up meetings arranged as necessary. These meetings are designed to collaboratively plan and agree on targeted support and actions for cohorts of concern, including persistently absent, severely absent, and vulnerable learners. EWOs work closely with schools to develop reasonable adjustments, and initial attendance plans for these learners, particularly those already known to the EWS. To ensure transparency and consistency, all schools receive a copy of the agreed actions, and a central copy is accessible to the Principal Education Welfare Officer (PEWO) to review as necessary. A need led approach is adopted with priority schools receiving enhanced guidance and input from the EWS through both the core and traded offer. During these meetings, schools and EWOs also discuss and agree on any legal intervention to be pursued.
 - 2.4. Agreed actions may include:
 - direct intervention and casework undertaken by EWOs on behalf of the school, where school-led interventions have been exhausted.
 - appropriate referrals to EWS
 - issuing letters and meeting invitations to families
 - setting up and leading attendance meetings with parental involvement
 - conducting home visits for families known to EWS.
 - supporting schools in signposting families to relevant external agencies and assist with referrals where appropriate,
 - ensuring a holistic approach to improving attendance and supporting vulnerable pupils.
 - multi-disciplinary support to families attending and convening meetings where appropriate.
 - access to the Early Help support team, which delivers intensive, practical, whole-family interventions to address the root causes of absenteeism and remove barriers to attendance.

- Advise the family's lead practitioner on attendance-related aspects of the support plan.
 - Statutory intervention, where necessary.
3. Schools have the option to purchase additional EWS support, which complements and enhances the enhanced core offer. This provision enables schools to access intensive, targeted intervention at both the whole-school and individual pupil level. It allows EWOs to closely monitor and track attendance for pupils with complex circumstances, ensuring timely and effective statutory intervention where required. This tailored support strengthens schools' capacity to address persistent absenteeism and improve overall attendance outcomes. The traded offer is now more flexible in its approach with schools choosing how they wish their time to be spent.
 4. A clear Attendance Strategy is now in place with a robust action plan on improving attendance and key priorities with measurable targets. The Attendance Strategy is in full implementation mode, with a focus on data, data driven targets, support and intervention and accessible data and effective data sharing with all schools.
 5. As part of the local authority's strategic approach to improving attendance, we regularly communicate key national and local messages. Attendance Forums play a central role in this strategy, offering a platform for schools to share good practice, receive updates from LA services, and raise concerns. These forums are well attended and valued by schools across the borough.
 - 5.1. Strategic meetings are held with all schools identified as priority support. These meetings facilitate collaborative working to develop and implement robust attendance improvement plans, including both whole-school strategies and individual pupil interventions. Plans are informed by data analysis, enabling targeted support for specific groups or cohorts. Good practice is actively shared across schools, and school links are encouraged for joint working between schools facing similar challenges.
 - 5.2. All secondary schools identified through the attendance data requiring priority support have had initial meetings with Principal Education Welfare Officer, discussing areas of strength and developments. Follow up meetings are scheduled to develop individual school action plan to improve attendance. The EWS will work collaboratively with each school offering high-level support and guidance through both the core and traded service offers. All primary schools have received invitation letters and initial meetings held in some schools.
 6. A dedicated duty officer is now available Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, ensuring prompt, accurate, and appropriate responses to school queries.
 - 6.1. Improved oversight of penalty notices (PN/s) and statutory interventions, where necessary. With strengthened and enhanced support to schools in preparing paperwork for court and feedback and advise where necessary, following prosecution.
 - 6.2. Clear guidance on issuing penalty notices has been circulated to all school, including detailed flowcharts outlining the steps for PNs (both unauthorised holiday and continuous poor attendance) as well as referral pathways. EWS now issue court warnings as per school's request, this shows a clear escalation while enabling schools to maintain a constructive relationship with parents.
 - 6.3. Guidance on off-rolling and Missing pupils was circulated to all schools in October 2024. The revised guidance supports schools to promptly identify pupils who are missing from school and take appropriate action at the school level, escalating concerns to the local authority (LA) via EWS, where necessary. Comprehensive measures such as database checks, home visits, WhatsApp communications, and Border Force and HMRC checks are now in place. Where feasible, a two-week turnaround is maintained, subject to the responsiveness of parents and carers. Schools are advised either to off-roll pupils with confirmed destination details or to retain them on roll, based on the outcome of the investigation.

- 6.4. The Working Together to Improve Attendance summary guidance was circulated to all schools, summarising respective responsibilities of both school and the LA in promoting attendance and supporting pupils.
7. A new system has been introduced to streamline the process for schools to request the issuing of PNs for unauthorised holidays. This system facilitates timely responses and ensures schools receive appropriate feedback on all matters related to the PN request and its outcome.
 - 7.1. A new referral system is implemented to streamline the process for schools when making a referral to the EWS, for poor school attendance concerns. This system will allow prompt receipt and processing of referrals to the service, seamless for schools, ensuring schools receive timely and appropriate responses.
 - 7.2. Revised guidance on the use of part-time timetables has been circulated to all schools in September 2025. The updated protocol includes a clearly defined referral process to the local authority (LA), supported by robust procedures for the collation and tracking of part-time timetables, including those involving pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Schools will receive timely advice and guidance from the LA as required, ensuring compliance and consistency across the borough.
 - 7.3. An Attendance Management Board was established in May 2025 and we are currently seeking school representations. The objectives of the Management Board are to ensure a strategic and coordinated approach to improving school attendance, underpinned by Early Help principles and a boroughwide framework and establish consistent practices across all attendance related matters, promoting alignment between schools and the LA. All services within Children's Services will be expected to understand and actively contribute to their role in enhancing attendance, thereby reinforcing the shared ethos that 'Attendance is everyone's responsibility.
 - 7.4. The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 requires schools to notify the local authority of any pupils who are regularly absent from school (where absences amount to 10 or more days, either consecutively or irregularly and have been unauthorised). The LA has developed a system to support schools to comply with their responsibilities. A simple electronic form will be provided to all schools. Once we receive a notification, where appropriate, an EWO will contact to discuss the situation or suggest further action regarding the pupil's absence or provide support.
 - 7.5. Working together to improve school attendance (DfE August 2024) places a requirement on schools to submit a sickness return where pupils of compulsory school age have been recorded as code I (illness) and who the school have reasonable grounds to believe will miss 15 days either consecutively or cumulatively. The LA has developed a system to support schools to comply with their responsibilities. A simple electronic form will be provided to all schools. Once we receive a notification, where appropriate, an EWO will contact to discuss the situation or suggest further action regarding the pupil's absence or provide support.

8. Contextual data on EWS intervention and cases

EWS involvement and cases for academic year 2024/2025	Numbers
No, of referrals to Education Welfare Service	113
No. of Penalty Notice issued	881
No. prosecution (for certain cases, we are still awaiting court outcomes)	20
No. of Missing pupils	122
No. of pupils found	105
No. of pupils untraced	17
No. of EHE (current)	301
No. of EHE closed	58
No. of EHE returned to school	25

9. Next Steps

- 9.1 Moving forward, we aim to facilitate collaboration between geographically close schools and those facing similar attendance challenges. These group discussions will adopt a solution-focused approach to address shared concerns and provide regular attendance data at both borough and individual school levels to support schools with benchmarking and attendance target setting. Joint guidance in partnership with Children's Social Care (CSC), will be issued to schools outlining how the local authority can support pupils with a social worker. Additionally, ongoing work with the Early Help service is focused on strengthening support for families experiencing complex attendance related issues.

10 Risk

- 10.1 Not retaining a central Education Welfare Service could result in reduced early intervention and preventive work with pupils, families and schools. This could result in increased persistent absenteeism and high absence levels. Families may experience delayed access to attendance related support and struggle to identify and address attendance concerns without appropriate support. It could delay efforts to identify and address boroughwide concerns and underlying causes of poor attendance.
- 10.2 Strategic oversight and data driven planning could result in a lack of borough-wide insight, making it difficult to identify trends, target resources effectively, or evaluate the impact of interventions. Attendance Forums and PEWO led initiatives foster collaboration and the sharing of good practice among schools. Without a central service, these opportunities may diminish. Schools may face additional burdens in managing complex attendance cases without specialist guidance. This could divert resources from teaching and learning.
- 10.3 The EWS is responsible for ensuring both schools and the local authority fulfil their statutory responsibilities in relation to pupil attendance. The absence of a centralised EWS could result in delays or, in some cases, a failure to initiate appropriate statutory interventions in a timely manner. This may compromise the effectiveness of attendance enforcement and limit the ability to safeguard pupils through coordinated and legally compliant processes.
- 10.4 There may be potential gaps in safeguarding particularly in cases involving missing pupils, or non-attending pupils. By maintaining close partnerships with schools and other agencies, EWS ensures that unexplained absences are promptly investigated and escalated where necessary. Their involvement helps to ensure that vulnerable children are located quickly and that appropriate support and protection measures are put in place.

11. Recommendation

It is requested that Schools' Forum approve the continuation of the CSSB contribution to the service ensuring that the centralised Education Welfare Service in the current model can be further developed. This will ensure that all attendance related matters are addressed effectively and efficiently, and all Haringey pupils continue to benefit from a dedicated, high-quality provision that effectively meets their educational needs and supports positive outcomes.